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CPM Project: Human Resources Certification Program

by

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This Project Submitted for Credit for :

Certified Public Manager Program

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Problem Statement:

For the past few years, agencies have been looking at their processes and making commitments for continuous improvement and strategic planning. The Human Resource arena has changed dramatically in response to requests from agencies who wanted more flexibility to manage their own systems in order to complement their mission and culture. Some of these changes include the classification and compensation reform, changes to the EPMS system, tuition assistance, and the ability to establish an employee reward and recognition program.

Given these changes, with others planned to follow, the Human Resource (HR) function is moving from a processing mode, with strict standard procedures and guidelines, to a forecasting, planning and designing mode. Traditionally, HR managers received on-the-job training for their positions and attended seminars from the Office of Human Resources on the "how-to's", to learn the technical aspects of their job. In order to effectively respond to the increased flexibility and to successfully move forward, the technical knowledge is not enough. We need to become partners in forecasting with management, far surpassing the technical perspective of human resources.

Professor Randall S. Schuler of New York University issued a warning to the HR professionals: "If HR didn't change, it would be dissolved, with the function split among the accounting and legal departments, outside consultants, and line managers. The human resource department is being presented with an opportunity to become a significant player on the management team," said Schuler. However, many HR departments still "remain focused on issues involving functional expertise rather than business relatedness," he argued. He recommended a repositioning of the HR department with the formation of new roles, competencies, relationships, and ways of operating for both HR and line managers.

To further highlight the changing role of the HR professional, a group of European HR professionals gathered in Geneva, Switzerland, to discuss the warnings that HR's demise would be imminent unless HR became "connected to and knowledgeable about the business, and ... perceived as credible by line managers. (Swagak, 1996, p. 32)

In an attempt to verify these assumptions, I conducted an informal survey with HR directors and managers. The following questions were posed:

1. Do you see your role changing from skill based to an overall knowledge outside of Human Resources?
2. Do you see recruiting for your office a HR generalist as opposed to a traditional single skilled employee. (Single skill - one with expertise in a specific area, i.e. compensation, employee relations, employee benefits, etc.)?
3. Do you think a curriculum based on all areas of human resources supplemented with some business courses would be beneficial?
4. If so, where do you see a need and what courses should be offered?

The responses were alike. The respondents unanimously felt that a training program, curriculum, for HR professionals was necessary. An HR certification program would offer a more unified HR workforce that "heard the same message" and methodology on the technical side.

Courses suggested included technical training on sample policies and their impact, human resource regulations with interpretations including both employee relations and compensation, retirement, benefits, workers compensation, leave, etc. Affirmative Action, recruiting strategies, and dispute resolution were other subjects suggested.

Technical related courses should be followed by broader subjects such as organizational development, developing career paths, writing skills, budgeting and finance, development of training plans, developing a strategic plan, management training, and personal development.

People felt that this type of curriculum would provide a more informed staff; promote uniform interpretations and operations of statewide HR departments; result in more career development and a career tract for professionals. Additionally, with the availability of the broader training opportunities, HR professionals would be prepared to integrate into the infra-structure of their agency more informed.

An article in the *Compensation and Benefits Review*, by Reyer A. Swaak, VP, National Foreign Trade Council, addresses the emerging role of the Human Resources Professional:

"This new HR executive should act as the tough but fair minded keeper of the corporate conscience and provide strong direction on all HR related issues, including selection, career management, development and training, performance management remuneration, labor relations, and the overall management of the enterprise. But above all, HR's key activity should be participating in the formulation of a mission and the translation of that mission into realistic objectives and strategies."

Proposed Solution and Outcomes

Through research, personal experience, and communication with fellow co-workers, it is imperative that we expand the present human resources role in State government. Presently, the human resources professional contributes the basic technical expertise necessary to accommodate the basic day to day functioning of an agency. However, it is becoming increasingly apparent to those surveyed as well as to professionals throughout all levels of government and private business and industry that human resources, as practiced now, is not enough. We need our knowledge base broadened to effectively plan strategically with management to attain goals in the future.

Therefore, I feel a Human Resource Certification Program should be established. A certification program of this nature would significantly impact the effectiveness and contributions of HR professionals. Presently there is no formal training program for HR professionals in State government. The current method of training is on the job and through sporadic training when new regulations are issued. There is a wide disparity in the operation of State HR departments. This is partly due to the lack of sharing information and common philosophies.

Participants in the program would gain skills that would benefit the agency in their day to day operations, but specifically in planning for the future. There should be a basic curriculum that offers the standard technical knowledge all State entities are required to follow. This course of study would improve the cohesiveness for State agencies and could ultimately reduce employee complaints about the differences in operating procedures by agencies. (In essence, all HR professionals would be "singing from the same sheet of music.") This basic curriculum could fall under the same guidelines and certification processes as the Associate Public Manager program.

To enhance and further develop a HR professional, a Certified Human Resources Program could be developed that would increase the knowledge base and facilitate the integration of HR into agency and statewide forecasting, strategic planning, and development with senior management. Courses in budgeting and finance, writing skills, development of training plans, and strategic planning, to name a few would aid in preparing HR professionals in fulfilling a more viable role within their agencies and State government as a whole.

From a personal standpoint, in the process of taking the Certified Public Manager courses, I have gleaned a comprehensive internal perspective of State government as well as management philosophies and practices. I feel the course work has given me a broader perspective in business and management practices outside the Human Resources field. This training has provided me with the tools to interface effectively with senior management on issues outside the traditional human resource field. With the CPM program effectively offering a broad base curriculum for managers, an HR Certification Program could be phased in with the existing CPM program, with the final project piece to be HR related. We would all be more effective and have the ability to contribute a vast amount of knowledge to each individual agency and State government as a whole, if a formal training program was available.

For a HR professional to transition into this role and build the professional creditability required to become an effective partner, the knowledge base must expand outside of the technical area into a much wider business orientation. Therefore, an HR Certification Program would be an integral part in achieving this goal.

Implementation Plan

To develop a strong, effective program that meets the needs of the HR community as well as agency executives, extensive input from both HR professional and agency senior management is critical. A partnership with the Office of Human Resources, the Human Resources Advisory Committee, and the SC International Personnel Management Association would be a critical buy-in that would be necessary for this program to be successful. A committee representing these groups would have to be developed to identify areas that need to be enhanced and to suggest course offerings. Additionally, representatives from this committee would need to communicate to agency directors this initiative and ask for their input on a certification program and the skills they feel would compliment and enhance their senior HR professional's role in their agencies. From

their determinations, a survey could be developed by the group for distribution to all HR professionals in the community for their input.

The major obstacle in this group effort would be breaking through personal barriers of "I know everything I need to know." "My agency is very happy with me, I currently fulfill this role." "Are you suggesting I don't know what I'm doing or I'm not up on things?"

However, with the support of key Human Resources professionals committed to this effort, a majority of the obstacles would be dispelled.

Evaluation Method:

Prior to entering the certification program, the attached questionnaire should be sent to both the participant and the agency director or senior staff member to whom they report. Upon completion of the program, the same questionnaire would again be sent to both parties with the intent to evaluate the success of the program in meeting the needs that were prescribed in the beginning.

This questionnaire would be a valuable tool to both the participants and their superiors, as well as an assessment mechanism for the program itself. Following up with the agency with the answers for both questionnaires would reinforce the agencies' commitment in developing their HR professionals in becoming a more integral part of their senior management team.

In closing, I feel an HR Certification Program would be a valuable asset to the HR community as a whole, as well as to agencies and state government. The HR function would surely broaden and become a vital function able to contribute effectively to the overall mission of the agencies.

HR DEPARTMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Is the HR department respected by the other departments in the agency? If yes, why?
If not, why not?

2. Does the focus of HR meet the needs of the agency?

3. Does HR have the authority to carry out their duties?

4. Is HR involved in the agency's strategic planning efforts?

5. What area (s) do you feel HR is most successful?

6. What area(s) would you like to see HR take a greater role?
